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ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE CANDELABRUM.

(A comparative Study)

Intimately connected with the grand and imposing architectural productions of Roman Antiquity which excite the admiration of the present age, there are other creations closely associated with them, which exercise an almost equal fascination on the mind — those rich and magnificent Specimens of the Decorative Arts, such as Marbles, Implements of Bronze, etc. for the service of the Temple, or for Palatial and Domestic use, in which the artistic genius is allowed more scope for the development of its creative powers.

In these creations are strikingly revealed the refined taste for the beautiful, and the astonishing talent for composition existing among the Ancients. In their productions, all of which bear the stamp of great purity and beauty of form, we see the same idea again and again repeated; but with an ever varying expression of form, while the ornamentation, never frivolous or misplaced, always seems to spring spontaneously from some innate necessity.

But, notwithstanding this exuberant richness of ornamental forms, a careful and wise economy of them may be remarked in every single specimen of the class to which it belongs. Amongst these specimens the Candelabrum occupies a conspicuous place in a practical as well as in a decorative and artistic point of view. In the first sense, as a portable object for domestic use, it comes, somewhat altered in form, within range of the present wants and requirements of common daily life.

The small Bronze Candelabrum answers to our ordinary candlestick: the Temple Candelabrum becomes the more significative Paschal Candle Standard employed in the early Christian, and ever since in the Roman Catholic Church, or serves in modern times for the embellishment of public buildings and squares. Not exactly designed as a means of support, the candelabrum

seems chiefly intended for the mere reception and elevation of the light. In accordance with this, and its more subordinate purpose, viz. to serve as a means for transmitting and giving support, three important structural features are to be distinguished, the Head, the Stem and the Base, together with their connecting and subordinate parts, such as fillet, bead, etc. The head, with its boldly projecting cup of foliage crowning the whole; the vertical and cylindrical stem, as an intermediate vehicle of transmission; the base, bending as it were under its weight; — all three appear equally well calculated to subserve their respective purposes, and give to the candelabrum in its entirety a truthful and characteristic expression of form.

Thus, in order to convey the impression of stability, the Antique Bronze Lamp Standard rests on three boldly extended claws, combined with honey-suckle or other types of conventional foliage (Fig. 1 and 2). From these, as a means of support corresponding to the perfect elegance of its termination, springs the shaft in the shape of a slender fluted column, or rather stem, throwing off ornaments more or less rich which cling round the bell of the capital, on the top of which rests a large tile or abacus carrying the lamp which is never a fixture (Fig. 3). A group of elegant leaves round the lower end of the shaft, and in like manner an appropriate ornamentation of foliage or architectural mouldings on the necking, form graceful transitions between the base, the shaft, and the bell of the capital.

Essentially different in its structural features is the Marble Candelabrum; the difference in material, as well as in purpose, demanding more earnestness and dignity both in conception and expression.

The foot, exhibiting greater massiveness and solidity, is formed according to the shape of the trilateral, and

less frequently the quadrilateral pedestals which were formerly much in use, especially for tripods. The three planes are enriched with ornaments in relief, their lower angles resting on lions' claws attached to the busts of sphinxes, the upper corners decorated with heads of sacrificial animals. The shaft, connected with the pedestal by finely designed horizontal mouldings, rises in elastic and delicate contours — the curve not dissimilar to the general outline of vases — and terminates in a decided cup or vase of bold design. (Fig. 5 and 8.)

In a comparative study of analogous art-productions of later periods we find only the masters of the Renaissance showing, in their creations, ideas and forms closely associated with the Antique. Greatly attracted and animated by the works of the Ancients both in Architecture proper, and in the Decorative Arts, and keenly appreciating the Genius revealed in the creations of Classical Art, we see them earnestly and intelligently endeavouring to make the most of the inheritance received from their predecessors. Always original in the structural features of their compositions, they derive only the form of expression from the Antique, borrowing or imitating its details. In these their works are equal to those of Classical Art, while in many examples the artists of the Renaissance surpass their predecessors in exuberance and richness of composition.

The Marble Candelabrum of the Renaissance is designed in strict accordance with the laws observed in that of the Antique. There are the same three structural features as true expressions of the same three purposes they have to fulfil. On a triangular or square pedestal rises the delicately curved shaft terminating in form of a cup.

The Bronze Standard compared with its antique model undergoes a change in the structure of the shaft and foot, this being an inevitable consequence of another form given to the head, a change which in its turn is rendered necessary by the introduction of a new source of light — the candle — instead of the lamp. The foot, in adaptation to these new statical and aesthetic characteristics, is rendered more massive by being less pierced (Fig. 6, 7, 9 and 10); while the shaft takes a curve similar to that of the Marble Candelabrum. From the latter also is derived the magnificent Bronze Candelabrum, or Paschal Candle Standard, marked by rich statuary decorations, and a pompous prodigality of ornament. In opposition to the antique, we now find the lamp,

when it appears combined with the candelabrum, no longer moveable as observed above, but firmly joined with it. Above the cup, finishing the shaft, rises the bellied vase (Fig. 4) carrying the light, thus enriching the termination by a double crown.

In modern times the discovery of gas gave rise to a new system of illumination demanding another constructive arrangement, but unfortunately we have not been quite so successful here as the Cinque-centists in a similar, previously mentioned case.

Seldom indeed do we find due consideration bestowed on the new characteristics to which an artistic and tangible form of expression should be given, viz. the impossibility of any displacement, the peculiarities of the burner, and the form of the shaft which this suggests in a certain degree. Our utilitarian mind is satisfied by merely adding, for this purpose, to the traditional models, a leaden conducting-pipe in the direction of the longitudinal axis, the burner in many cases taking the unmeaning and spiritless form of a candle-end.

This most convenient but idle system of borrowing and adapting to our own purposes the already existing objects of art, and the consequent neglect, frequently observable in the prominent features of our works, of the old fundamental laws of common sense, of adaptation to the purposes the works have to fulfil, and of truthfulness of expression with regard to the requirements out of which they have grown; this building up, in short, of decorative forms without any clear appreciation of their aim and purport; this is the cause of so many unhappy productions in the Technic Arts during the last twenty or thirty years.

To all this must be added a prevailing tendency to experimentalise in all sorts of styles, a tendency, which, resulting from an all-powerful Fashion, and subject to her ever-varying and capricious demands, is easily satisfied with the mere outward mask of a style, and thus renders impossible a clear understanding of the intellectual value of any period in Art.

To this platitude and uncertainty in questions of Style and Art we wish to oppose an earnest study of the works of our old masters in Art, the ancient Greeks and Romans. Imbued with their truthful spirit, the masters of the Renaissance, applied themselves in earnest to elaborate the problems fallen to their lot into works most grand and successful. Under similar conditions we may be sure of similar results.

Fig. 1, 2 and 3 from the Museo nazionale, Florence.

„ 6 from San Lorenzo, Florence.

„ 5 and 8 from the Museum of the Vatican, Rome.

„ 4 from San Andrea della Valle, Rome.

„ 7, 9, 10 from the Museum of Bargello, Florence.

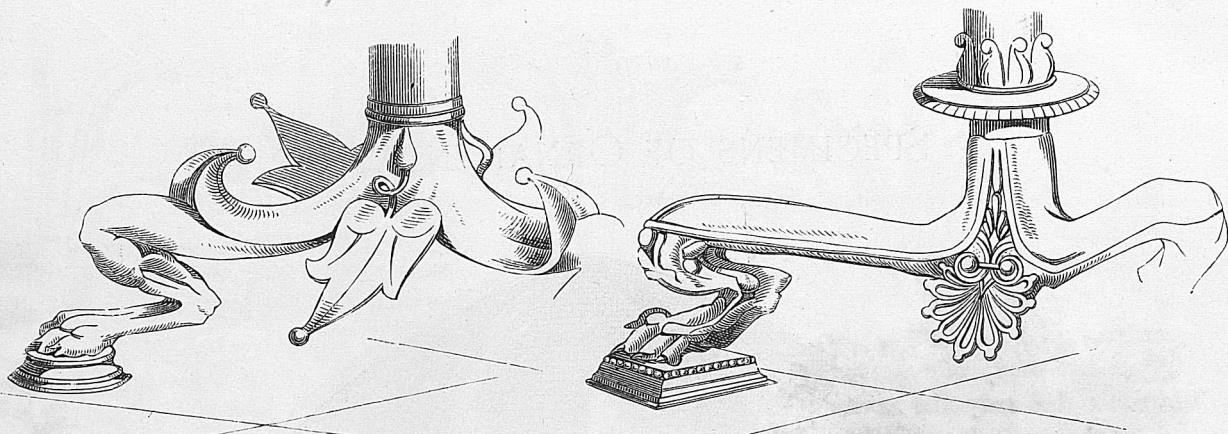


Fig. 1 and 2.



Fig. 6.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 5.

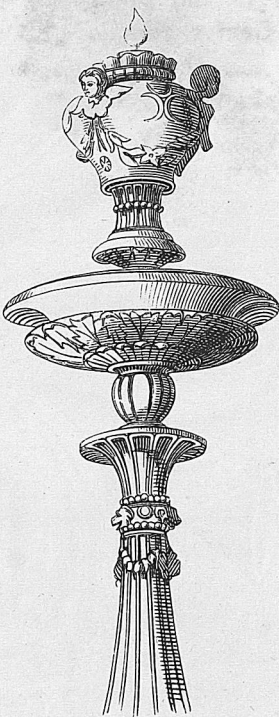


Fig. 4.

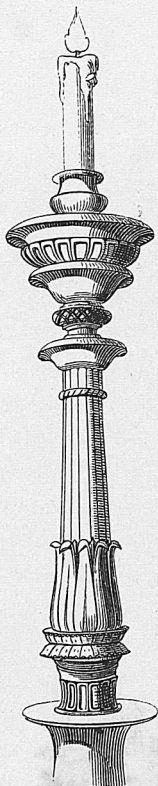


Fig. 7.

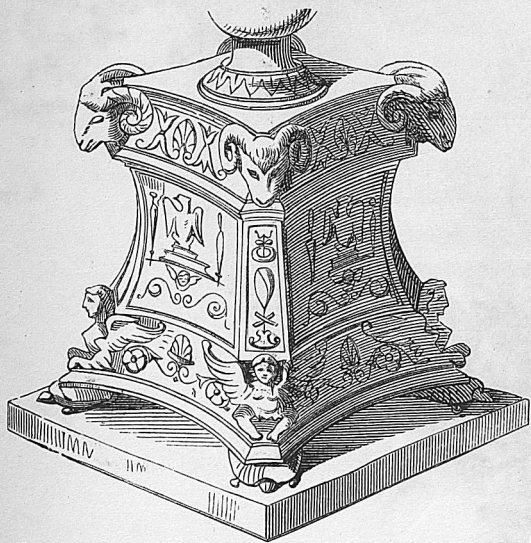


Fig. 9.



Fig. 8.

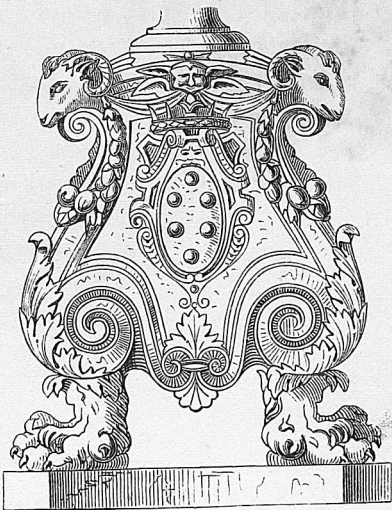


Fig. 10.